Code # 26
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NEW JERSEY

1999-2000
Guidelines and Application

STAR SCHOOLS

ORIGINAL

RECEIVED NOV 22 1999

Deadline for Application to County Office: NOVEMBER 22, 1999

County	Hunterdon
District (Proper Name)	Clinton Township School District
District Address	P.O. Box 6, Humphrey Road (street/p. o. box) Annandale (city) 08801 (zip code)
District Telephone	908-735-8320 Fax 908-735-9036 Email wmahler@ctsd.k12.nj.us
Chief School Administrator	Dr. Walter Mahler
Nominated School or Nominated Charter School (Proper Name)	Round Valley Middle School
School Address	128 Cokesbury Road (street/p. o. box) Lebanon (city) 08833 (zip code)
School Telephone	908-236-6341 Fax 908-236-2847 Email dtait@ctsd.k12.nj.us
School Principal	Diane Tait
Chief School Administrator's or Charter School Lead Person's Signature	Walter Mahler

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Approved: ✓ Yes ___ No County Superintendent's Signature J. Ericson

NEW JERSEY STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

NEW JERSEY
STAR SCHOOLS
1999-2000 APPLICATION

RESPONSES to the information below and the statements must be ANONYMOUS. No reference should be made to the names of the district or the school. Use the words "the school" in referring to the applicant in the responses to the statements.

The following data is required to assist the panelists in the evaluation of the application:

Type of School	Grade Levels
____ Elementary School	_____
X Middle School	6,7,8
____ Junior High School	_____
____ High School	_____
____ Other: _____	_____

School Enrollment 578

Specialization of School or Whole-School Reform Model
Differentiated Programming and Instruction

Previous Star School: Yes __ No X If Yes, Year(s) _____

KEYBOARDED RESPONSES to the statements below must be **no more than a total of four pages. Keyboard the statement followed by the response.** Limit your response to the number of lines specified.

1. Describe the school's specialization or whole-school reform model and its objectives, the student educational needs and the *Core Curriculum Content including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards** that it addresses. Detail how it promotes high student achievement. **(Maximum of 70 lines for response)**

2. Describe the professional development activities and research of the school's faculty, and detail to what extent these activities contribute to exemplary teaching practices in their classrooms. Explain the link between these activities and the specialization or whole-school reform model. **(Maximum of 30 lines for response)**

3. Describe the leadership style of the school's administration and how the management and educational program demonstrate administrative and fiscal efficiency. Describe any innovative scheduling and/or management strategies. **(Maximum of 40 lines for response)**

4. Describe student performance for the school years 1997-98 and 1998-99 and the means by which student results are measured, and outline other school accomplishments during this period. Detail the relationship of both student performance and school accomplishments to the specialization or whole-school reform model and its objectives. **(Maximum of 40 lines for response)**

5. Describe collaborative efforts with parents, business, the community and/or higher education that contribute to a school environment governed by the students' needs and promoting high student achievement. **(Maximum of 30 lines)**

6. **Previous Star School Winners Only:** Provide an addendum to your application that describes efforts to expand or replicate the specialization or whole-school reform model within the school and/or the district. Have there been dissemination activities beyond the school or district? If so, please elaborate. **(Maximum of 30 lines for response)**

*The May 1996 edition of the ***Core Curriculum Content Standards*** published by the New Jersey State Department of Education was disseminated to all districts and charter schools and is available on line through the department's website at http://www.state.nj.us/education.

1. Describe the school's specialization or whole school reform model and its objectives, the student educational needs and the *Core Curriculum Content and Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards* that it addresses. Detail how it promotes high student achievement.

Our school's specialization is the use of differentiated programming and instruction to meet the unique needs of every student in an inclusive school community. We hold common and challenging curricular expectations for all students, but we believe that there are many ways for youngsters to meet them.

We have been developing our specialization for the past five years, beginning with a commitment to transform our junior high school structure into the small learning communities of a middle school. Our small communities, or teams, have different compositions and schedules based on research and on experience with multifaceted student needs. For example, a team may be composed of two teachers, each integrating two subjects, such as math and science or language arts and social studies, and a special educator. Another option is a four-person team with two language arts and social studies teachers sharing half the team with the math and science teachers in three-person teams within the team. We also have a team of five teachers, within which are three-teacher and four-teacher team options. The upshot of all these configurations is that we offer our students many comfortable learning alternatives. At the end of each year, the fifth grade teachers at the elementary school and our sixth and seventh grade teachers hand schedule students onto heterogeneous teams using a wealth of information gained through a review of records, articulation with team and specialized colleagues, and discussions with parents. The information is used to provide the best "fit" between teachers and students, students and other students on the team, and the overall team affect and a student's personality. The question we ask ourselves is, "How will this child learn best?"

Within the teams we hand schedule students into classes that may be taught solely by the core teacher or collaboratively by the core teacher and a colleague (a special education teacher, the speech-language specialist, and/or a teacher assistant). The commitment to collaborative planning and teaching among staff members to ensure that the needs of all learners are met is one of our strongest assets. Because we collaborate and differentiate, we are able to set high expectations and place our youngsters in challenging grade-level programs in every subject area, including mathematics. (All students take pre-algebra in grade 7 and algebra in grade 8.)

The differentiation that occurs within classrooms is designed to meet the needs of all members of the school community. This is the credo that drives every teacher's instruction. Before designing a lesson, teachers pre-assess the readiness levels of their students by testing, observing, and/or examining a broad body of student work. Instruction is typically differentiated in three ways, although there are many variations on these possibilities. Teachers "tier" lesson materials to varied levels of difficulty, adjust activities to accommodate learning styles and preferences, and offer product choices that capture a particular talent, intelligence, or interest. Learning stations, interest centers, flexible skill groups, cooperative learning groups, and individual contracts are used to organize differentiated materials and activities.

Visitors to our classrooms see learners working side by side on assignments that are tied to the curriculum content being addressed but different in design and/or complexity. For example, in an eighth grade language arts/social studies class, some students at a Civil War learning station called "Remembering Slavery--In Their Own Words" might be engaged in an "interpersonal" assignment through which they express their feelings about slavery while others are demonstrating "mastery" through the creation of a graphic organizer on the slave experience. In a seventh grade pre-algebra class, one cooperative learning group might be using centimeter cubes and geoboards to solve basic area and perimeter problems while another group at a higher readiness level is using calculators to address complex area and perimeter exercises.

Off-team programs also provide differentiation. These include vertical acceleration in mathematics, instruction in a resource room setting, and both on- and off-site pre-vocational assignments. Our award-winning schoolwide enrichment program offers all students opportunities to explore areas of interest and/or skill through Renzulli-based Type II and Type III experiences.

Differentiated programming and instruction are used to address the Core Curriculum Content and Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards with all students. We are particularly proud of our literature-based language arts program, in which students read genre-related and author-specific works at their readiness levels (Language Arts Literacy Standard 3.4); our buildingwide research program, which affords students the opportunity to analyze and synthesize material in an area of interest in each of their three years at the middle school (Language Arts Literacy Standard 3.4); our mathematics program, which places students in one of two grade-level programs and routinely involves them in differentiated activities (all Mathematics standards); our experiential, problem-based science program, which makes extensive use of cooperative learning and learning stations, is delivered in state-of-the-art science labs, and is linked to real-world phenomena (Science Standard 5.2); and our focus on the acquisition and application of critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills in situations that are relevant to groups of learners as well as to individuals (Workplace Readiness Standard 3).

2. Describe the professional development activities and research of the school's faculty, and detail to what extent these activities contribute to exemplary teaching practices in their classrooms. Explain the link between these activities and the specialization or whole-school reform model.

Professional development for administrators and teachers is both a district and building priority. As a staff, we eagerly pursue experiences that will help us more effectively meet our students' needs. Those experiences assume many forms, including graduate courses, out-of-district workshops and conferences, and in-district workshops, sharing sessions, and CEU courses often conducted by our own building and district staff members.

Prior to the restructuring initiative, we researched and received training in teaming, collaborative teaching, and cooperative learning. Nationally recognized consultants (Thousand and Villa, Merenbloom, Merrill, Renzulli) worked with us. Since then, we've read and discussed materials authored by other experts in the field (Kagan, Tomlinson, Danielson). We have also participated in numerous training sessions focusing on curriculum standards and differentiation techniques. Our schoolwide enrichment teacher and a number of regular and special education teachers have attended sessions conducted by the New Jersey Department of Education, the Association for Curriculum Development and Supervision, the National Middle School Association, the Optimal Match program coordinated by Johns Hopkins University, and the Schools Attuned program developed by Dr. Mel Levine at the University of North Carolina.

We routinely share what we learn from these experiences as well as ways we've applied our new information and skills. For example, during 1997-98, several language arts teachers described and displayed their learning stations on a videotape that was shown to the entire staff. In 1998-99, a number of teachers discussed their tiered activities--in the areas of language arts/social studies, math, science, and life skills--during faculty meetings. It is clear that professional growth activities and sharing sessions have moved our differentiation efforts forward. We encourage one another to take risks with new strategies, we rejoice in our successes, and we learn from our failures.

3. Describe the leadership style of the school's administration and how the management and educational program demonstrate administrative and fiscal efficiency. Describe any innovative scheduling and/or management strategies.

As part of the district leadership team, the principal and assistant principal participate in vision- and goal-setting for the entire school district. They then bring that vision back to the school to create a climate of "students first." While there is a distinct leadership structure at the school (principal, assistant principal), the actual leadership for the school emerges from all areas of the community.

Teachers are invested members of the leadership "team" because they create the structure and initiatives needed to deliver differentiated instruction. Teaching teams work fairly autonomously in making decisions about programs and students, though they are unified by a shared purpose, ongoing communication, a sound curriculum structure, and common training in the area of differentiation.

Operating on a philosophy of consensus-building established by the principal, committees comprised of all members of the community--staff members, parents, students--work to bring the vision to fruition. An eleven-member site-based planning committee currently oversees differentiation efforts by reviewing assessment data and establishing and monitoring our building goals. Other committees, such as the Athletic Program Review Committee and the two committees that met in 1994-95 and 1995-96 to restructure the school, are formed as program issues arise, including committees charged with the selection of new staff members. The search for teachers and teacher assistants who believe in and can implement differentiated programming and instruction is ongoing.

Cost-efficient placement/scheduling, resource-utilization, training, and hiring practices result in a per pupil figure for the school that is below the state average. Because our teams are empowered to generate creative and flexible scheduling and instruction options for their youngsters, we are able to retain students in the school who might otherwise be assigned to costly out-of-district placements. Our teams use cooperative purchasing strategies in order to acquire materials needed for differentiation. Team leaders, who spearhead our differentiation efforts, receive no stipend for their leadership activities. While there are costs involved in sending teachers to out-of-district workshops, turnkey training sessions are far more cost-efficient than sessions run by consultants. When hiring new teachers, we conduct comprehensive interviews to secure low-cost but highly capable and philosophically compatible individuals who will support our differentiation efforts.

4. Describe student performance for the school years 1997-98 and 1998-99 and the means by which student results are measured, and outline other school accomplishments during this period. Detail the relationship of both student performance and school accomplishments to the specialization or whole-school reform model and its objectives.

In 1997-98, 96% of our 150 regular education eighth graders passed all three sections of the Early Warning Test, and 55% achieved Level I proficiency in all three areas. Our Level I proficiency percentages in each section were also strong: 72.7% in reading, 84.1% in writing, and 73.5% in mathematics. Our Level III percentages were quite low: 1.3% in reading, .7% in writing, 1.3% in mathematics. We are also proud of the performance of our special needs youngsters; our Level I/II percentages were 53.9% (reading), 38.5% (writing), and 66.6% (mathematics).

In 1998-99, 80.7% of our 188 regular and special needs eighth graders passed (or scored at the Proficient or Advanced Proficient levels on) both sections of the GEPA. In language arts literacy, 95.2% of our students scored in the Proficient or Advanced Proficient levels, and a very low percentage (4.8%) scored in the Partially Proficient range. In mathematics, 82.9% of our students scored at the Proficient or Advanced Proficient Level (with a strong 37.4% in Advanced Proficient), while 17.1% were Partially Proficient. The performance of our special needs youngsters was exceptionally strong; our Proficient or Advanced Proficient percentages were 76.2% (language arts literacy) and 90% (mathematics).

Our sixth and seventh graders performed effectively on the IOWA Tests of Basic Skills. Composite national percentile scores for both years are as follows: total/84, reading/84, language/83, mathematics/94.5.

District assessment techniques also demonstrate growth. These include class work and teacher-made tests as well as portfolio-maintained performance-based work in writing, research, mathematics problem-solving, science experimentation, and language arts/social studies project development. District and state rubrics, district benchmarks, and state standards are used to assess student acquisition of concepts and skills.

In both years, approximately 25% of our eighth graders received the President's Award for Educational Excellence, 10% of the eighth graders received the President's Award for Educational Improvement, 13% of the eighth graders received special awards for outstanding effort and performance, 4% of the total school population qualified for state-level competition, performance, and/or recognition, and nearly 40% of the school population received awards for outstanding performance in a number of regional, state, and national programs and competitions.

Other school accomplishments related to differentiated programming and instruction include the following: participation in a grant-funded Optimal Match program coordinated by Johns Hopkins University; involvement in grant-funded Schools Attuned training; receipt of two state awards for our in-class support program in speech-language; acceptance of invitations to conduct workshops on differentiated programming and instruction issued by the National Middle School Association, the New Jersey Alliance of Middle Level Educators, the Northeast Region ASCD, and the New Jersey ASCD; numerous visitations by educators from other districts who are interested in instituting differentiated programming and instruction.

5. Describe collaborative efforts with parents, business, the community and/or higher education that contribute to a school environment governed by the students' needs and promoting high student achievement.

Parents play a critical role in the education of early adolescents by working collaboratively with staff members to identify programs and instructional strategies that "fit" their youngsters. We make connections with parents through frequent team-home and teacher-home communication (telephone calls, notes, e-mail, progress reports, report cards), by involving parents on planning and decision-making committees, and by working collaboratively with parents who sponsor and assist with PTA activities. We also work with an ever-increasing number of parent/community volunteers who serve as resource speakers, research assistants in the library-media center, teacher assistants, career specialists, and production assistants. We solicit specific input from parents through surveys and monthly parent advisory meetings (principal-parent sharing sessions open to all parents), and we conduct evening sessions for parents that include information on differentiated programming and curricula.

Collaborative efforts with community organizations also enhance differentiated programming. We have established partnerships with four local businesses that provide funding for and/or assistance with our science program, grade-level cultural arts activities, and our pre-vocational program for special needs students. In addition, resources received from our education foundation, a United Cerebral Palsy grant for "The Game of Life," and an Ethicon grant for robotics instruction, have helped us meet the needs of our students.

Local colleges and universities that are familiar with our differentiation efforts invite our staff members to make presentations to classes, and students visit and request student teaching placement in our classrooms. In 1998-99, twelve math and science teachers completed a Raritan Valley Community College math/science/technology integration training program.